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881 they sleep by the 'mother' of the lodge (*maɖala*) near the fire. Those a little older set their traps and catch mice, which they roast by the *khisibe* fire; but relish and wild fruit is usually forbidden to them and they may not, though they often do, drink water. Sick boys, elsewhere subjected to hardships and taunts, are nursed and given soft food, not the hard *khivonclo* of the novices. The novices who go out to hunt certainly resent the malingering of the lazy ones (*magɔtha*), who are strong enough, but stay at home on this or that pretext. But the true spirit of the *vudiga* is seen, not so much in the beatings that the shepherds (*medabi*) administer, for they are beaten as much as if not more than, the novices, but in the actions and attitude of the older men. There are *medidi*, one regiment senior to the *medabi*, who are never beaten, but may be fined; and older than they are the old men (*vakhalabye*). They are kindly greybeards, some of them officials of the lodge and some who do no work (*vuraliziɬd*). Some of them constantly intercede for the young and weak boys who are threatened with punishment or trials beyond their strength or endurance, or 'stand for' those deserving novices who had been obedient or generous or respectful in their childhood. Above all, these old men, mellow with age and mature in wisdom, conditioned to a culture founded upon compromise and easy relations, not only restrain excesses, but add to the beauty of the performances by chanting their refrain of sayings and proverbs, encouragements and admonitions. It is they, not the shepherds with their whips, that give the tone to the proceedings.

The stage after this period of seclusion is called the 'change' (*hu fedulelwa*). The boys sit by the fire facing the rising, not the setting, sun, as was the case in the previous three months. Of course, we must not expect precision: the 1919 fire ran north-south, not east-west; the ideal always gives way to the practical, for the east-west disposition was rendered difficult, though not impossible, by the slope of the ground. In other respects also it was the spirit not the letter of the law that determined various arrangements. After the 'change' life is somewhat different in the lodge. The boys used to do homage (*lɔsha*) to a *morula* tree near the fire as if it were their ancestor (grandparent). But the tree
●[778] mysteriously withers and, after the change, is replaced by a pole (*murakadu*). No teaching is done from either tree or pole as is the case in other tribes, but it is associated with a whole series of ritual acts. After the 'change' no longer shepherds but women bring the food; boys perform within sight of women; some of the food taboos are raised, but
[762] relish, though always brought, is forbidden and still thrown into the refuse heap. Apart from these and many other changes, we must also mention the visit by the novices to the village in order to 'beg for salt'. Then they sing the praises of salt, the seasoning virtues of which they now fully appreciate, having gone without it for so long. But on their return the pole has gone; their grandparent has died.

[535] And now we press on to a day of great doings. The novices go out to 'scratch [as fowls do] for food'; only this means a spectacular dance before the women. That night, the last night in the lodge, it is *khilalamusi*, the night of standing, though many quietly dose off or escape to rest in the bush near by; there is none of the concentration we expect on

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occasions of importance. The boys are shown several sacred objects (*dzigoma*), each with its own meaning; and the proceedings end with the naming of the lodge and the new regiment that has been created. Next morning the boys remove the clay that 'disguised' them during their seclusion. They are given a loin cloth, which they wear back to front, their hair, except for a circular crown, is shaved and they are smeared with fat (not ochre among the royal Lovedu). They are 'people from the refuse heap' (*mvigwamathukhu*), a name they discard only when, a week later, their heads are completely shaved. As they leave, the lodge, with all in it, is burnt down.

The *vudiga* is not at an end yet; it has merely entered a new stage in which the discipline is further relaxed. The novices leave the lodge with double-pointed sticks, covering with their hands the two ends, which are fashioned like the *glans penis*. In that manner they go about whenever they are in public; the action is said to impress upon them the necessity of concealing the object and meaning of circumcision. When they arrive at the village their mothers appear dancing with joy and choose out their sons, not always correctly, because their heads are bent down and their bodies have grown a good deal in the lodge. A goat is killed for them; it is the goat 'of vomiting the rats', for as men they must cast out the things of their childhood. Then for the next week they are in a state of semi-seclusion, but there are still many observances. They appear in public only in the bent, humble attitude, they carry their sticks, and they wear their loin cloths the wrong way round. Nevertheless, the 'gathering up' (*hu aluha*) into the society proceeds apace. They have a special enclosure made for them in the veld, the *khikhudi* (hiding place or secluded spot), in which they spend some time of the day. But they are scattered, as each group of villages has its own secluded spot; and their separateness and solidarity is further broken up by sleeping at home and herding for their own people. They do not speak, especially not to women, but at night at home they have contests of riddles (*nyibo*) with the old women who come to visit them, exactly as after a marriage ceremony. This stage ends with the 'seizing of the lion' (*hu tsuara dau*). One night the shepherds go out with bullroarers, the whirling of which produces the roar of the lion. The boys give chase and he who catches the 'lion' is praised by the old men.

Finally come the last ritual acts. The boys are taken down to the river to lift the 'stomach of the cow', a log tied to a stone in a pool, and then to 'kindle a fire on the river' (done on a log in the water), for a man must be both strong and clever; he must be able even to make fire in the water. After these tests there is the final ordeal at the cave to which the boys are taken one by one, are beaten and given their last admonitions. At the cave the double-pointed stick is discarded, the fat removed from their heads and, if two brothers have attended the same lodge, the elder beats the younger on the way home to remove the presumption of belonging to the same regiment. At home the initiate's mother must soothe him by a gift to 'open his mouth', and next day each of the boys, accompanied by a shepherd, goes to visit some relative, who will feast him with meat and beer.

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CHAPTER VIII

FERTILITY AND THE DRUM CULT

The setting of the sacred drums in a mystical cult—initiation into the secrets of the whistling ancestors—calendric observances connected with fecundity, masks, and mummeries.

794 Besides the girls' puberty ceremony and the circumcision of boys, there are other initiation ceremonies among the Lovedu. One is the *vyali* (often looked upon as the women's counterpart of circumcision because of its regimentation), contemporaneous with which is the boys' *vuhwera*, consisting largely of masked dancing; another is the *gomana* for men. These are closely interwoven with a fertility and rain cult which, because of its association with sacred drums, one may call the drum cult. Their educational object, never very strongly marked in Bantu initiation schools, pales into insignificance before the ceremonial. Indeed the *gomana* as a 'school' is only an aspect of *gomana* ceremonial as a whole, the primary function of which is to secure rain. The *vyali-vuhwera-gomana* complex is characterized by esoteric masks, mummeries, and mysteries and by a category of values which we may term the 'mystical philosophy' of the Lovedu. We shall give merely a brief picture of the complex, because, at the time of writing, the first *vyali-vuhwera* held for thirty-five years is still in progress and our ideas as to its true meaning are far from being settled.

794 796 The sacred drum cult has many ramifications. The *swidzimi*, supposed to be ancestral spirits coming to earth to take part in *gomana* singing and drumming of the sacred drums, have become incorporated into other aspects of the culture. They appear in the bush near the village whenever a harvest offering has been made in the families of royal relatives; they come at the installation of a new district head and at the [533] death of close relatives of the queen. On these occasions they join in the singing and dancing of *lenga* songs, songs associated with the *vyali* of men and which, in addition to the above-mentioned occasions, are employed also when women dance for rain. The type of instrument by [776] means of which the *swidzimi* whistle or bleat out their songs and messages is used also by the Bird, the ruling spirit of the *vyali*.

534 ●778 Drums are much used in Lovedu life; they are played in the *guba* dance to the accompaniment of reed pipes, they are important in all initiations except circumcision, they are beaten for days at the dancing of possessed people, and it is significant that the public recognition by the queen of a new district head at his installation consists in the handing over of a drumstick (*khisha kha gomo*). Drums are of two types: the long cylindrical drum played with the hands as it lies on its side and the *gomo*, a rounded drum with handles, played by means of a drumstick as it stands in an upright position. The sacred drums (*digomana*) of the tribe are of the *gomo* type, but, unlike ordinary *gomo* drums, are played by hand, not with a drumstick. They are four in number, each with its special

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name, and are kept at present in a village beside the bush in which the last three rulers lie buried. Their keeper is a descendant of Maleguda, eldest son of Mugodo, who fought with Mujaji for the throne. These drums are not to be seen by the public, nor are people, except inmates of the royal district, supposed to pass anywhere near there. In appearance and decoration they are no different from ordinary drums, but they are made in a special way and it is said that the maker 'will see them with his eyes but never hear them with his ears' (*i.e.* he will be put to death when his work is done). The largest is *phagagi*, which stands about 4 ft. high; next in size is *gagge*; then comes *pekuhure*; while the smallest and most important of all is *ragwadi*, to which is attributed powers even of locomotion, because in 1892, when Albasini set fire to the royal village, it was the only one of the *gomana* drums that was not burnt. While all four *gomana* drums are said to contain a human skull instead of the stone that one usually finds inside it, *ragwadi*, the smallest, has the facial skin of a human being placed (in strips, it is said) under the resonator of ox hide and has, smeared on the outside, the body dirt of the person (said to be always a chief councillor or other important person of royal blood) killed for its manufacture. This drum is thought to be closely associated with the welfare of the tribe. Should the chief have occasion to escape from enemies, she should take with her this drum, and it is said that, when the heir to the throne receives instruction in the use of rain medicines just prior to the death of the ruling chief, she must be sitting upon it. In some of the neighbouring tribes the sacred drums are pierced on the death of the chief.

The care of these sacred drums, involving periodic smearing with fat and ochre to keep out weevils and moths, renewal of the skin resonators, building and repair of the hut in which they are kept, is the work of a special section of people, those of Racothata, whose totem is *ghou* of Dulubye. Dulubye is in Phalaborwa, where this drum cult is much stronger than among the Lovedu. These Racothata are also responsible for closing the *nyali* initiation at the capital when they come at its end with their weird-costumed dancing performers, the *magogodye*. Thus once again the *gomana* and the *nyali-tshomo* are linked into a common complex. The sacred drums, played only on special ceremonial occasions and by men, not women, who are usually responsible for drumming, are looked upon as gods (*vadimu*). The praise of *phagagi*, the largest, is 'Leg of *phagagi* of Mulhale [*the old chief*]; if it is not a god we can throw it away rotting to the pool' (*Goto la phagagi a Mulhale hi nga re a ri vadimu ri ga laga ri Mugulone ra isa mudiwani*). The Thavhna and Nareni, tribes to the south of the Lovedu, offer to the sacred drums the first-fruits, and everywhere their beating is associated with rain and the agricultural year. Not only are the drums gods, but their sound is thought to be very pleasing to the *midzimu*, those ancestral spirits who, when the drums are sounded, come and sing and dance. The knowledge that their part is played by initiated men does not appear to detract from their importance in the eyes of those who are in the secret. The instrument used consisted in the old days of the tibia of a human being with a feather inserted (and there is reason to believe that some of these are still extant) but to-day

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they use mostly two pieces of wood slightly concave on the inside in which a piece of sinew or reed is temporarily inserted. The language being tune-bound, messages and songs can be understood when whistled. Not all ancestral spirits, but only those of the Lovedu proper and of some of the important groups, such as the Khaba and Nareni, are thought to be able to visit the earth as *zwiǫlajani*.

The most important feature of the drum cult was the beating of the sacred drums in an enclosure near the village, usually in the afternoon and evening on six successive days twice every year: in the spring just before the sowing and in winter after the harvest thanksgiving. The spring drumming was preceded by propitiation of the royal ancestors by means of a libation on their graves in Ǫaja Forest, where the earlier chiefs lie buried. There was a special procession which no one was to see on pain of death, the Mulodoni River had to be crossed at a special spot called *Khǫabo-eakobǫ* (washing place of great people) and it is maintained by some that a black ox was also slaughtered. The district head at Ǫaja, who was responsible for clearing a way to the graves, had to plant near the royal graves a little of every seed cultivated. The people would then see, it is said, which grew best and would plant much of that. The *gomama*, the beating of the sacred drums, 'was the chief thing that had the power of asking rain from the ancestors'. The sounding of the drums at harvest-time was a thanksgiving. The first harvest *gomama* after the circumcision took the form of an initiation, in which the neophytes were introduced into the drum ritual and the secret of *zwiǫlajani*, and received cuts on their faces as a sign that they had passed through it.

Though the sacred drums are still kept and the Ravothaja people are still called to repair the hut in which they are placed, the regular beating of *gomama* drums has fallen into disuse. The last *gomama* initiation held officially by the queen in the tribe was in 1892, just before the accession of the present queen. It is difficult to account for this lapse when among neighbouring tribes the cult is still fully carried on. Some say the reason lies in the ritual murders that are associated with the drums, but since it is an accepted principle that a sheep may satisfactorily take the place of a human being and, moreover, this difficulty must somehow have been overcome in other tribes, this reason does not appear good enough. Possibly the cult was introduced from the south and had not become sufficiently assimilated or taken deep enough root to survive the lethargy induced by European contact. Perhaps the rain-making powers of the queen herself made it largely unnecessary. It is not impossible that it will suddenly spring back to life, as did the *nyali* in 1938–9 after a lapse of over thirty years.

Though the queen herself now holds no *gomama*, the institution is not dead. Elements such as *zwiǫlajani* have taken permanent root and the queen has allowed a stranger, Rasekwale, a rain doctor of the *kwena* totem who came to live on European-owned land under her jurisdiction, to hold a *gomama* with, of course, his own drums, and in 1929, when he came to ask that boys from the royal village should be allowed to attend the initiation, she gave her consent. He holds one *gomama* a year, receiving

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881 every morning from about five o'clock till after sunrise, is looked upon as a burden that has each time to be 'lifted' (*ku rula*) by the order of some old woman or man until the arrival of the Bird, when it will rule the girls at its own pleasure. Only on rare occasions, when an important visitor comes and presents the older women with a gift of snuff or money, can initiates be excused altogether for an evening. It is a hardship, too, to go all through the winter, mild though it is in the lowveld, with no covering over the upper part of the body—so much so that one married woman in the 1939 initiation pretended she was pregnant in order that she might cover her body. When she was discovered, however, she was severely beaten. The discipline of the *nyali* is not so strict that initiates are not able occasionally to absent themselves unnoticed from the singing. If discovered, they are beaten, sometimes by the queen herself. More serious cases in which an initiate has been absent for several days are treated more drastically: a whole procession of women carrying the drums sets out to her village where they pull the thatch off the roofs of the houses and exact a fine of a goat, which is killed and eaten by women and initiates alike. Breaches of the rules in the *nyali* are punished in the 'school' itself: when a number of girls shaved their hair, an action strictly forbidden during the year of initiation, not only they but all their age-mates were beaten for the offence. As a result, the offenders were pinched and ill-treated by their fellow initiates, who had been punished on their behalf. Initiates who quarrel among themselves are beaten when they gather in the enclosure to sing. There are no hardships connected
[178] with food, but on various occasions, when the girls are taken out to be shown secret objects (*digwas*), they are beaten—and one may see the marks of the sticks on their bare backs when they return. Sometimes there is an ordeal, such as being made to crawl along a path strewn with the velvet stinging-bean which causes intense irritation and itching over the whole body.

But such hardships occur only on special occasions and are by no means the order of the day. We should also be careful not to construe the beatings in terms of our conceptions. Where we have seen them, they were half serious, half playful—for instance, when the attendant of the Bird, amid merriment from the onlookers, chastised late-comers to the evening performance, the force of the blows being spent innocuously upon the skirts of the girls as they ran past him to take their places. The hardships and beatings certainly do not depress even the smallest of the girls. During the *mavale* season they had to make a large quantity of cider which was consumed by initiated women, who gave a little also to the men, and, on one occasion, when the courtyard became overgrown with grass, the initiates were made to weed it. These tasks over a period of a whole year indicate clearly that work is not a major hardship.

881 778 A most essential aspect of the *nyali* is the showing of *digwas*, usually in some secluded spot to which the initiates are taken, but also on occasion at home in the evening, when there will be dancing all night (*Mililolowani*—night of standing). The connotation of the word *gwas* is difficult to grasp. A *gwas* is something secret and wonderful, something which it is a privilege to see and which is usually shown to initiates during an initiation.

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Though made by men or women, there is something almost supernatural about a *gwasa*: its manufacture is called 'giving birth to' (*ku dzwala digwasa*) and though, for example, in the case of a dancing *gwasa*, every one knows that some person is playing the part, this in no way detracts from its importance. Many of the *digwasa* are masked figures in costumes made of grass, reeds, or leaves. Some are mummeries with a meaning attached; others are simply interesting or wonderful objects. One *gwasa*, *dzou* (lion), consists of a sound made by passing the hand down a stick on a piece of hide held over a pot. These *digwasa* are traditional in initiations, but very often new ones are invented and, since different regiments or areas come on many ceremonial occasions with their own *digwasa*, there may be a mild competitive element in the showing of *digwasa*, especially in *khobe* and *nyali*. Laws taught in initiation ceremonial are also referred to as *digwasa*. But the greatest of all *digwasa* are the *gwasana* drums, which are looked upon as gods and are associated with the ancestors and religious ritual. *Digwasa* vary from laws or mummeries to semi-gods. The element of awe, so conspicuously absent in Lovedu religious practices, is found in their attitude towards *digwasa*—not that there is any display of awe towards them or in their presence, but that in referring to some of them people talk as though of something awesome or god-like. Even the *swidzimi*, ancestral spirits, who come to earth when *gwasana* drums are played or at religious ceremonies, are thought of as *digwasa*, which in this manner become part of religion itself.

The greatest *gwasa* of the *nyali* is *khinsimi* or *khinsimula*, referred to also as the great Bird of Mukale or of Rhodesia who, like most *digwasa*, is believed to come from a pool in the river. It is a *gwasa* of the men and manifests itself only when there is moonlight, returning, it is said, to its pool when the moon is dark. But it is always there, secreted in its enclosure. The girls have to sing whether it is there or not, and often, though the moon is dark, it whistles its directions and commands. It consists of a light, semicircular framework about 4 ft. high, over which are put strings of the *mupu* thorn tree (*Acacia rehmanniana*), which have been placed in water to become black. Surmounting it all is a small head crowned with an ostrich or other feather. It is seen only occasionally, when it comes dancing into the *nyali* courtyard at night, and, in spite of bright moonlight, its black colour makes it difficult to discern it clearly. It speaks and sings by whistling through an instrument similar to, but larger than, that used by *swidzimi*, made of the leg-bone of cattle.

This Bird is the ruling spirit of the *nyali*. It has many praises used by the girls in its honour. Coming as it does when the green foods of summer are being eaten and the grass is long, it is the embodiment of plenty and has daily to receive from each initiate summer foods and beer. All the time it is there every one in the area who makes beer has to bring one calabash to its enclosure. If this is not observed the person may be fined. The Bird regulates the whole procedure of the *nyali*, ordering which songs have to be sung, telling the girls when to dance, when to stop singing, what to do. At times it even gets angry and then, if it is dancing, it may stamp out the courtyard fires. Any infringement of the rules of the school are referred to as 'breaking the ribs' (*ku rova lujagwi*)

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of the Bird. One man was fined a goat for beating his wife. The Bird said, 'You've beaten my *mutegumi*' (married initiate); another, an important official in the *nyali*, was fined for swearing at an initiate who made a mistake in her answers to the Bird. From the time of its arrival, the women of the village may not get up and begin stamping in the early mornings before the Bird has made itself heard, and it is even said that *Khinglgumi* does not like cocks near the village, because they crow before he has begun to whistle and so disregard his precedence.

The arrival of *Khinglgumi* is a culminating point in the *nyali* and comes after long and elaborate preparations. For months before its arrival, men have been erecting various enclosures beside the village—one enclosure and hut to house the Bird itself, leading into a large courtyard in which the singing and drumming of the initiates is to take place once the Bird has arrived. At the far end of the courtyard is a row of de-barked poles set up in a specially medicated furrow, backing a carefully prepared platform on and around which the initiates stand when singing in the mornings and evenings. It is looked upon by the initiates as a kind of refuge from the Bird should he come too near. In front of this *lwalilo* stands the *khulumosi* shrine of the *nyali*, a long medicated pole of *musuo* (*Terminalia sericea*) forking at the top end into a circlet of branches. Round this pole a circular mound has been built, containing a river stone like many religious shrines. Here it is that the initiates have to stand when conversing with the Bird. Besides the enclosure, there are other preparations for the arrival of the Bird. From February and March, when the grass is long enough, bundles of *lepepe* rush (*Mariscus sp.*) to be worn by the initiates once the Bird has arrived, are woven, dancing skirts of a special kind of reed strung together in pieces about 1 in. long are made, and pointed, flat pieces of wood, two for each girl, are prepared for use while singing. No significance is attached to their manufacture.

A great deal of the ceremonial of the *nyali* centres on the Bird and, in the ritual conversations that take place morning and evening between the women and the Bird, special terms peculiar to the *nyali* are employed: mealies are 'teeth of Shangane-Tonga'; beer is 'fat of the crocodile'; native potatoes are 'fingers of the baboon'; firewood is 'bones of the giraffe'. Every day some girls and women are detailed to carry the drums at about four o'clock in the afternoon to the enclosure, there to await the pleasure of the Bird. Sooner or later the Bird whistles out '*mulure a Khidigwe*', the opening phrase of the praise of the head of the initiates, whereupon one of the girls (any one—not necessarily the chief girl herself) mounts the shrine and replies in a loud voice, 'I've been waiting here a long while, Bird of Mohale', adding one of its many praises. 'Whose *nyali* (initiate) are you?' asks the Bird. 'I am the *nyali* of So-and-so' (giving the name of her father). The Bird will then, whistling metaphorical phrases, order the drums to be beaten, indicating what song is to be sung. The sounding of the drums is the signal for all the initiates to come to the enclosure, which gradually fills as they arrive in twos and threes. After much singing and drumming, the Bird may ask, 'What have you brought me?' to which the initiate, replying, answers, 'Crocodile's fat', or whatever she has brought. In the 1938-9 *nyali* there

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was at the royal village an arrangement whereby a certain number of girls brought beer every evening (six to eight calabashes), while in the mornings each initiate came with green mealies, nuts, or any appetizing dish. These are put down at a certain spot from where the *lumati* and *lumatyowa*, men who act as go-betweens when the Bird is crying, interpreting if necessary what he says, carry it all into the Bird's enclosure, where it is consumed by old men. During the *nyali* these old men sleep in that enclosure if they like, and greatly enjoy the good food brought for the Bird. Sometimes, when too much for them has accumulated, they may send some to the queen or district head. Later the Bird orders the girls to eat their supper, which they have brought with them, and after a long time gives the order to stop, '*Kwanga*'. After a while the Bird asks for his wood. Each initiate has brought one piece of wood, with bark removed, lest, it is said, scorpions which are apt to be found in the bark bite the Bird, and at the order of the Bird all proceed to a spot near the entrance to the Bird's enclosure. Here at a given signal they throw down their wood with a great noise and rush back to their platform of safety. If the moon is bright, the girls will be told to don their dancing skirts and do their whirling dance and, if it likes, the Bird itself will come dancing in, keeping to the shadows, and with one or two men always near to act as guides. They are given the order to stop by the Bird at about ten or eleven o'clock at night or eight o'clock in the morning.

Towards the end of the *nyali*, when *mmerethi* songs are sung, the older men come and dance before the women, waving ox tails in their hands. They would, in the *nyali* of old, wave the tail over the head of a woman they liked and, if she acknowledged it by bowing the head and clapping with hollowed hands, she was giving her consent to be his lover during the initiation. For a remarkable feature of the *nyali* was promiscuous sexual intercourse between men and women in which initiates could take part only at the end. In the 1938–9 *nyali* there was no such intercourse: it was thought that the young married men were too 'wild' (owing to modern conditions) to tolerate a position in which the older men could have free access to their wives in the initiation, and it was said that the great preponderance of women over men might lead to great jealousies and conflicts between the women for the favours of the old men.

Towards the end of the initiation a number of important events takes place. There is, first of all, a ceremony in which the old men tie up the hair of initiates—which during the year has grown to a length of an inch or two—in tufts all over the head with strings of the bark of *mutsimivivi* (*Rhabdotis Galpinii*). After this the women belonging to the previously initiated regiment come into the enclosure one by one, dancing and shouting the praise titles of any area in the country. They are followed by the initiates, beginning with the office-bearers, and the ceremony therefore takes a full day or longer. While this is going on, one of the girl initiates, who is addressed by the praise-title of a wife (*mujamowe*) of the queen, is taken to have her hair shaved and is dressed in a leopard skin with a collarette of beads round the neck. On her return a mat is spread for her to sit on and she does obeisance in the normal manner (not the manner of initiates). Another office-bearer (*mwetshi*) is given a standard

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881 of feathers to shade the head girl. After much dancing, cloths are
tied round the initiates in the manner common to the possessed. This
ceremony foreshadows the end of the initiation and indicates to the whole
country that it is drawing to a close. The last month is devoted to
881 dancing: every area that is holding a *siyali* sends its initiates to dance
535 before the queen, some coming with *vuhwevu*, others without. Last of
•778 all come the people of Ravothata with the *magogolwa* and it is their
performance that closes the 'school'. The *magogolwa* have more imposing
[293] costumes even than the *vuhwevu*, characterized by the stuffed baboon
and duiker that surmount them. After a number of important *digwas*
have been shown, there is a grand finale one night (*khilolwevu*), when
the Bird hangs its head sideways and says, 'My head aches and I know
my end has come.' A *digwa* of the women, the Butterfly (*khirwevele*),
dressed in leaves, comes dancing in at the girls' entrance to tease and
chase the Bird. Before sunrise, when the Bird has returned to its hut,
some of the initiates (those who have come for a short time only) may be
taken to 'touch the Bird', a terrible ordeal. Then next morning they are
all taken to the river, where they are shaved and given new clothes to
wear. They are now 'things from the rubbish heap' (*zwigwamothokhu*),
like boys after circumcision: they walk in a bent position, may not speak
freely, receive gifts, and at night ask riddles (*dinyethe*) specially associated
with initiations. The enclosures are burnt. After a final washing in the
river the initiates return to ordinary life and activities. A small operation
[304] is performed on initiates at the river on the last day. Among some tribes
it consists of defloration, but among the Lovedu it is said to consist of a
cut above the clitoris which is so small that it causes no pain or incon-
venience.

881 At the time when the initiates make preparations for the arrival
242 of the Bird (February-March), the boys of those areas that have the
535 *vuhwevu* as well are taken out into the bush every day to learn how to
weave the elaborate costumes associated with this initiation. These are
of two types: a light one, said to be for hunting, and a heavy one. Both
costumes have skirts of fringe-hanging grass, flung out in a circle by the
gyrations of the dancer, as well as comely waist, arm, and leg bands and
under-skirts of woven grass. The light costume has in addition broad
shoulder bands crossing over chest and back and a mask resting upon
the shoulders, veiling the face and open at the top. The heavy costume
is far more imposing. Besides a woven waistcoat, there is an immense
covering for head and shoulders, rising to a crested summit, flanked by
what gives the impression of scales arranged in rows or projecting wings,
and fronted by a snout like that of a crocodile. The dance reminds one,
now of the prancings of a male bird courting its mate, now of a lizard
convulsively shaking its whole body as it runs upon a rock. The lizard-
bird suggests a weird dragon-like mythical monster, but its appearance
belies its functions and qualities, though perhaps not the mystical mean-
ing of the *digwas* of the 'school'.

[778] The enclosure for *vuhwevu* boys is made beside that for the Bird. Here,
after having being beaten with medicated sticks, the boys spend their
time, except when out hunting or dancing, their food being brought to

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the *nyali* courtyard by their sisters. They are taught a few 'laws' or formulae associated with the *vuhwera*, but their main activities are learning to make the elaborately woven costumes and later to dance in the *nyali* courtyard. Towards the end of the initiation they spend most of their time going about to dance, accepting invitations from other district heads and paying their respects at the royal village. They do beautiful movements to the drumming of their own *nyali* girls. Only two dance at a time and, while they dance, attendants (*medabi*) stand near by supervising. The masked boys may whistle out the tune to which they wish to dance or may beg snuff by means of whistling (for this is their only means of conversation during their initiation). When they dance well, women and girls come to give them gifts of leg- or arm-rings. The *vuhwera* is a kind of finishing school, an initiation into the secret of what the Bird is and how the costumes are made. It is almost as though this is an esoteric art, the preservation of which has become the main function of the *vuhwera*. A person who enters the *vuhwera* enclosure may be required to display his skill at weaving and in 1939 a man who was unable to weave (and thus showed himself to be uninitiated) was heavily fined. The fact that there is no *vuhwera* held at the royal kraal, whose boys used in the old days to go for this initiation to Khadja or to the *Tsanwani*, a section of the Khadja, suggests that the institution is a more recent adoption than the *nyali*.

It is not easy for a European to appreciate the meaning and value of such institutions as *nyali* and *vuhwera*. Most of their features cannot be explained by the Lovedu themselves. They are the result of a long, historical development which, in the absence of all evidence, may never be unravelled. The *nyali* has many aspects. One of the most important is that of a crossing or initiation similar to circumcision. The initiates are often called *vavedi* (crossers) and initiation may be referred to as 'to cross over' (*ku vula*). It is conceived as a period of hardship, a crossing for which medical treatment and ancestral blessings are essential. Respect for those older than oneself is emphasized: the initiates must be humble; but older people, especially the old men who remain in the Bird's enclosure, live royally on the beer and delicacies brought daily by initiates. There is emphasis, too, on the importance of the rank of district heads and chief, and the learning of praises of all the areas, followed towards the end of the initiation by inter-district visits, is an important feature.

Intermingled with and overshadowing the *nyali* as an initiation is the *nyali* as a fertility and rain cult, related to the *gumana* drum cult and serving the same purpose. The *nyali* lasts a year, a full agricultural cycle, and some of its stages are associated with the seasons: the typical *nyali* dress of the girls cannot be plaited till the grass has grown long; the Bird arrives only when there is plenty of food. The singing of *nyali* songs is believed to bring rain. Even before the rains of the summer of 1938-9 had fallen, it was said in Uuloovedu that the year would be one of plenty on account of the *nyali*. These expectations were more than realized, for not only was the summer rainy, but even the winter, which is normally dry, was exceptionally wet. Stress is laid in the *nyali* on grass and vegetation: the girls wear plaited bandoliers of grass which are said by

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784 783 789 778 some to render them fertile; the *digoma* are almost all made of grasses, reeds, or leaves; the remarkable *vuhwevu* costumes are made of various special kinds of grass; and on one of the most important excursions made by the *nyali* girls, called *maiglini* (at the locusts), they are made to collect the bark of various kinds of trees. The *nyali* as a fertility rite is most clearly seen in the sexual intercourse at the order of the Bird which used to be indulged in towards the end of the initiation on the approach of spring. The true meaning of the Bird is difficult to discover, though it is significant that it is associated with moonlight, comes from a pool, and declares on its departure that it will leave mists behind it. In one praise song of the Bird it appears to be referred to as *vadzaja*, the ancestral spirits: 'I have heard you, Bird of ours and Rahufa of Muhale. The father of giving has gone, O *vadzaja*. There remain only things for which one must pay' (*Gi hu phulaphudz nomi yesu le vuRahufa a Muhale rahufa khi ile, vadzaja, hu sadz kha muthzgo ftla*). This Bird, *goma* of the old men, is related to the *gomana* cult, using the same method of whistling through an instrument.

881 794 771 The Lovedu appear to have borrowed *nyali* and *vuhwevu* and the *gomana* drum cult from neighbours. Some elements, like *maiglajani*, have become firmly embedded in a number of institutions; others, like *vuhwevu*, are looked upon more as entertaining appurtenances without any very serious meaning beyond that of giving pleasure. But the sacred drum cult clashes to some extent with the rain cult of the queen and there is little doubt that to this fact one must partly attribute the failure to beat *gomana* drums in recent years.

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643 171 Sotala had formerly to take poison when disaster or a natural defect fell upon them. Among the Lovedu, tradition decrees that the queen shall have no physical defect and must poison herself, not when she is old, but at the end of the fourth initiation (*vusiga*) of her reign. The emergence of physical imperfections and the holding of the fourth *vusiga* cannot both determine the date of suicide. In fact, no reign has been cut short because of bodily defects, though the conception of the relation survives. The queen is believed to be immune from disease and it is thought that her first will be her last illness; it is even said that Mujaji III's elder uterine brother was excluded from the throne because of his weak ankles. At the same time, not kings, but queens are wanted, there are no tests of physical fitness as are recorded for tribes in the north, and in the legends [173] of the Lovedu and of tribes which, following the Lovedu, have ritual suicide, physical defects do not figure as a theme. In this complex, heirs to the throne have been disqualified or chiefs have been deposed because of inability to make rain, disobedience to their sovereign, or adultery with his wives. Among the Mamaila, a branch of the Lovedu, one chief is said to have become a cripple because he forced open the door which magically yields to the touch of the true heir, and the Nemesis that overtook him is attributed to his sin, not to his defect. Impotence disqualifies in the north, but Mujaji II was barren and, in the pattern as adopted in some tribes, such as the Khaha of Maake, barrenness of the queen is expected; for, as the queen may have no official husband, it is a virtue to have no children. That conception is not accepted by the Lovedu, for Mujaji II's barrenness was a source of sadness and strife and every effort was made to cure her. Physical fitness is an aspect of the perfection and divinity of the queen, but it has no practical relation to the right of succession.

643 176 171 177 The relation between the length of a reign and the initiations is far more obscure. In many tribes where ritual suicide is enjoined (Thavina, Khaha, Uriwa), the number of 'schools' is said to be seven. The 'schools' are there held more frequently, and possibly there is some connexion with the number of sacred drums (*digwa*), for the Khaha have seven and the Lovedu four. The chief's life, as we have seen, is intimately bound up with the drums; both drums and 'schools' are great *digwa*, objects or activities in which power is concentrated. Power is also concentrated in *dithugula*, a category of objects chiefly associated with the gods. The distinction is not that between magic and religion; the *digwa* and *dithugula* appear to belong to different cultural complexes. The one was characterized, we may suppose, by 'schools', drums, and cults linked up with national calendric observances, dramatization of the crises in life, and the sanctity and power of the chief; the other, by sacred beads, shrines, reincarnation of ancestors in dedicated animals, and ritual suicide of the chief. In the process of merging, the great *digwa* were, we suggest, grafted on to the royal institutions and brought into relation with the life as well as the death of the chief. This is little more than speculation, for it is difficult to isolate the oldest cultural substrata and their distinctive patterns.

The rule about physical fitness is now merely an ideal and, similarly,

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634 for land would then be regarded more favourably should he one day
425 return. The fruits of the soil are dealt with in much the same manner.
423 A man may graze his cattle inside or outside the district, but the cattle posts of the old days were within the district only. We have mentioned the rivalries of herdboys of different districts; we may add that some district heads, because of traditional values and limited grazing land, object to fencing. District heads sometimes reserve valuable trees for themselves, and it is they who give permission for the cutting down of large and shady trees or indigenous fruit-trees (though they be on the landowner's land). Honey found in trees, but not that found in the ground allotted, belongs to the district head. Some heads allow only residents to cut grass, making others pay. Hunting and water rights are not so regulated, but digging of clay is sometimes, if illegally. The
● [778] preservation of large forests, a national asset, as places of the gods or of refuge in time of war is the concern of the queen, so that, for instance, Mujaji II had her cattle driven into the gardens of some people, including a district head, who had cleared part of the *Levyemi* forest and had not begged pardon by sending a *mujamusi* to her.

634 Some distinctive cultural and administrative arrangements of the
643 districts have already been mentioned. There are many others. All
651 district heads used to have, and many still have, certain fields cultivated for them. The queen also has such fields in her districts, and since 1927 each district head has had to cultivate a field (*murewa*) in his district for the queen, an innovation suggested by the European to enable the queen to help her people during famines. The experiment has turned out very differently. These fields are badly cultivated, for years some district heads bring no mealies, the failure only sporadically leading to the penalization of the head and his district, and the mealies are always converted into beer for entertainments at the capital that benefit only the local residents. The storage of mealies is impracticable and a system of distribution is not implied in cultural arrangements. A district head unwillingly surrenders land and sometimes expropriates first one then another landowner, so that there is much dissatisfaction and even refusal to cultivate the *murewa*.

634 In many respects district heads are like chiefs. They are often called
651 'chief' (*khosi*) and, like the queen, have medicines to safeguard them in their position of authority. A district head is not only the most important person in the district, the centre of its political and legal life, the man who is responsible for the welfare of his people, but the obligations of district residents towards him emphasize both his position and the reciprocities between ruler and subject. It is expected that his subjects shall bring him beer periodically, and sometimes it is held that he should be invited to every beer party held in his area, partly because he is responsible for order at the beer drink and partly because it is his due. All his subjects must make *marula* cider for him in the proper season, and similarly, when at certain ceremonies, held by him for the well-being of the district, beer is required, every resident must contribute. The most important occasion is at the harvest thanksgiving and the beer brought is regarded as being in return for the land given by the head to his people. On the pattern of

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which royal ancestors only can withhold; differences in the harvest between one area and another are often attributed to fights between the witches of the two areas, and even variations in yield between one man's field and his neighbour's may be due to witchcraft. Yet one finds in prayers many a request for a good harvest, even though there are no special ceremonies devoted to this end. A man pouring a libation for a sick child said among other things, 'Give us corn; when we plough let us also reap. Why are you stinting us?' And it is significant that the only regular religious observance is the harvest offering of beer made of each year's new corn in villages where there are shrines or dedicated animals. When any one dies, there is thought to be danger that the fertility of the crops will depart with him or her. Hence, when a gourd of seeds of every kind is placed in the grave together with a firebrand and calabash of water for the journey, some of the seeds are scattered over the body with the words, 'Do not depart with all the corn and seeds,' and very often the grain belonging to the deceased is treated with medicine in order that it may remain fertile.

Above all, the ancestors complain, a fact which lies at the basis of Lovedu religion, for by far the greater proportion of religious rites are those performed in response to ancestral complaints. One might at first think it strange that the gods, in life just ordinary, well-disposed people, should in death be so liable to bring trouble upon their kin. Sometimes it is thought to be a sign of love: when Manilu's grandmother had made him ill because she wanted a goat dedicated to her, his mother said, 'No wonder his *gogo* seized him. She was always so fond of him.' But chiefly it is the nature of ancestors to complain; as the Lovedu phrase it, 'When people sleep (*i.e.* are dead), they ought to complain' (*Ha vonha ne khi lala fase na mamogh ba nditala*). When there is illness, they are, as it is phrased, 'seen in the divining bones'; it is they who sometimes 'hold' the woman experiencing difficult childbirth, and sometimes, but far less than among the Nguni, their complaints cause dreams. Our close friend Walter, coming to seek work in Johannesburg, dreamt disturbing dreams of his dead father, who appeared to say that he was needed at home. He thereupon returned home and, when he arrived, his mother took him to a doctor, whose bones declared that the dead father was annoyed at not having been told of the journey to town and had to be appeased (*ba pitsa*). Walter was well educated, but he had failed in his last examination and felt doubly frustrated. He had great ambitions of reforming the political system of the tribe, from which his education had divorced him, and in-town he was dissatisfied that nothing was open to him but the unskilled work of his uneducated compatriots.

An ancestor may complain about the way he has been buried, and if he has died far from home, may demand to be 'brought back home' in a ceremony in which, besides the dedication of a beast or goat, a goat is killed and eaten, its bones being buried as though it were a person. But this 'bringing home', involving the making of a shrine, applies only to those dying at a distance and does not resemble the 'bringing home' of the Zulu, among whom it is part of death ceremonial. At times the gods complain of neglect. But in the majority of cases no definite reason for

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the complaint is either given or required; and frequently no special spirit is mentioned. It is enough to know the cause of the trouble and what rite is necessary to placate the gods. Even complaints of neglect are usually put positively: 'He complains that you should give him (his shrine) a libation'. The ancestors desire mainly to be remembered: they want their beads worn, their name revived, a beast or goat dedicated to and named after them. They also like to be told about journeys undertaken or marriages, in much the same way as the living, and to be approached with a libation. Yet, unlike the Nguni, they never complain of being hungry; nor are the gods said to drink the libation or even its spiritual counterpart, but are merely pleased to be given their due. There is no such thing as resting secure because you have done all that is necessary for the gods; there is always some ancestor who can cause trouble, and it is best to wait and see what is wanted. Moreover, the ancestors are wayward; there is no knowing what they may desire. Mambeuli asked to be buried at Khikhuni, but after his death he caused sickness, saying, 'Why did you bury me in the valley in the sun' (instead of in the ancestral grove), and a black sheep had to be sacrificed on his grave. Similarly, Mulegwane, brother of the queen, who in 1934 became a Christian on his death-bed, withheld rain in 1935 because they had buried him in a Christian cemetery. Religious rites among the Lovedu tend, therefore, to be addressed to those spirits that cause trouble and in the absence of illness there may be no rites at all.

Certain objects which were once in the possession of the ancestors are used in religious ceremonial and are thought to have special powers of protection and healing. These objects, consisting of ancient beads of glass or native-worked iron or copper, native-wrought assegais, hoes, axes, iron rods with spiked heads, are handed down in the family and carefully cherished. Very often when a daughter leaves to be married, she is given a few beads to take with her for use when she is ill. Such charms are called *thupulo*. Illness caused by an ancestor can generally be cured by a ceremony known as *ku phasa*: a mixture of ground grain and water is poured over beads or other *thupulo* objects in the presence of the patient while a prayer, scolding the spirits and asking for health, is made. The beads are then worn by the patient till he recovers. After *ku phasa* on beads for *any one*, he may wear them at *any* time with protective results, and small children generally wear many old beads. Masenibe called hers 'my hospital' (*spitola sa ga*) to illustrate their powers to us in European idiom. Petsane says, if he does not wear the crocodile bone that was his father's, he gets ill or dreams much of dead people. Association with the ancestors, not anything inherent in these objects, gives them their powers, for we have seen an old Boer gun brought out as a *thupulo* at an offering. Yet for a charm to heal it is not essential that it should have been in the possession either of the complaining sufferer himself or of his family. Sometimes the gods, through the dice, mention beads or other objects not known in the family at all. It is then concluded that they have been lost and steps are taken to procure them from some one else or from the queen, who has many. Then when they pray, it will be mentioned: 'We are replacing the lost bead.'

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769 782 825 Offerings may be poured on the ground or on *thugula* objects. Sometimes, however, the ancestors desire a shrine or a dedicated animal. The queen herself and some others have dedicated cattle, male or female, according to the spirit represented; a few families have sheep, while the majority have goats. Fowls are neither dedicated nor killed for the gods. But we have one instance of a dedicated snake, that in the Relela family, to which in 1939, at their burial grounds in the depths of the forest, libations were offered when the *nyali* initiation began in that district; the conception is wholly alien to the Lovedu, though the Relela have been so long linked with, as to be indistinguishable from, them; and the snake, said to whistle, is described as like that dreaded monster, the 'mountain snake' which is often thought of as a mamba but strikes terror like the omen it is. The use of these different animals is traditional in, and bears no relation to the wealth of, the families concerned; some have a dedicated animal, others merely a shrine, while many have both. The dedicated animal receives the name of an ancestor, father or grandfather in the case of the head of the lineage, or of any complaining spirit that has demanded such *thugula*, and it is believed that his spirit (*muya*) has entered into it. Some dedicated animals are credited with abnormal powers: Mamujaji's agitation one day, while being driven to the dip, correctly presaged unpleasantness with the dip inspector; Malegudu is the fiercest bull in the land, like the warrior whom he represents. Though some people unceremoniously pour beer-offerings down the throat of dedicated animals, it is generally claimed that, unlike ordinary animals, they readily drink beer, but the claim is contradicted by the mealie leaves put over the beer to coax the animal to drink. In 1938, when Malegudu, called from the herd to drink the harvest beer, remained immovable, every one was afraid to approach him, but it was considered sufficient to throw the beer over him from a distance, so that by licking himself he might partake of the offering.

• 778 Shrines, which are to be found generally on the left-hand side of the entrance to the sleeping hut of the chief wife, vary in appearance and contents. A shrine may consist of a small mound of earth, containing the [824] bones of a sacrificial goat; it may be a sacred plant or tree, usually *pipiguasi* (*Hypoxis villosa*) or *lesoni* (*Haemanthus sp.*) and *mutabu* (*Ficus capensis*), a black river stone, a long stick, or even a piece of a certain kind of ant heap (*khiphoni*). The queen's own shrine is a mound under which are buried the bones of a goat slaughtered some twenty years ago when it was set up. Mashishimali's shrine contains no bones, but consists of a *pipiguasi* lily and a river stone, both visible above ground. Ramatiti has three shrines and one dedicated goat, all of which have arisen out of illness caused by ancestral complaints. Of the first, the shrine of his father, nothing is visible above ground; it consists of a buried piece of ant-heap, used instead of a goat because Ramatiti is not the chief son, who should have the dedicated animal, and a black river stone which keeps the spirit cool and appeased (lying down), as well as the three plant substances [825] *mufiru*, *lusugo* (*Alepidea sp.?*), *vulungaja*, which are placed in most shrines to make the ancestors 'forget'. The other two are mounds containing the bones and heads of goats, one representing his mother, the other, like the live goat, his mother's brother, his wife's father.

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In the actual working religion of the Lovedu the commonest and most conspicuous rite is *ku phasa*, consisting of a prayer and the pouring on to earth or *thupula* of a mixture of ground, sprouted grain and water, a mixture colloquially referred to as *mujaswa lesilo* (the rinser of the winnowing basket). More rarely *ku phasa* is merely spitting out water in the courtyard to the accompaniment of such prayer. There is no formulated distinction in principle between the two forms; the Lovedu say that the dice decide which is to be used. We found water squirted in illness caused by complaints of the living; in some cases of difficult birth; where in the initiation of a possessed woman the spirit was begged to manifest itself; and in one exceptional instance water was squirted on the face of a corpse addressed in prayer before it was buried (usually the corpse is merely addressed when the grains are put into the grave). The efficacy of *ku phasa*, which is also used magically to render witchcraft ineffectual, appears to lie in its 'cooling' effect. *Ku phasa* is performed in connexion with a large number of cases of illness and bad luck and is the recognized approach in asking for blessings on a journey or an undertaking. Hardly a week passes without some one in the neighbourhood having to *phasa*, and generally the prayer in these cases takes the form of a 'scolding' (*ku rukasa*), in which the spirits are asked why they are causing illness and told to be satisfied. One does not *phasa* without also using charms in the mixture to make the spirits forget, and the officiator may be male or female, whomsoever the dice have indicated. Rites of thanksgiving, except for the customary harvest beer, are almost unknown. We came upon such a rite only once when the bachelor brother of Madinji returned home after an absence in town of thirty years and she performed *ku phasa* in the presence of the family, saying, 'Spirits of Mambeuli, this is one of your fowls. We thought he was lost; now he is back. Keep him as you have kept the rest of us. If he goes away, let him soon remember and long for his home.'

The only regular offering is the annual harvest beer given to dedicated animals and shrines, though even this may be neglected: the village may be moved without the shrine, or the dedicated animal die without being replaced. We ourselves witnessed the setting up of a shrine and dedicated sheep after twenty years' neglect in the chief house of Sedena. Much more formal than ordinary rites of *ku phasa* is the harvest offering, which may take place any time between July and November, for there is here no rule that the queen should take precedence. The officiator is a woman where possible, the *khadi*, who is specially called to come, and real beer, called *mephaba* and made of eleusine, is prepared for the ceremony. If eleusine is not available, red kaffir corn (*mabbaba*) may be used, but no other grain is acceptable to the spirits. In its preparation, which is in the hands of old women or girls below the age of puberty, care must be taken that the eleusine is steeped, not ground on the grindstone, and that some of it is tasted before the gods have been given some. Ordinary beer is tasted to see if it is ready, but *mephaba* is smelt or tested by stirring with a twirler. Though the married women of the village play no part in the religious rites on such occasions, it is the duty of the chief wife in whose courtyard the ceremony will take place to smear with dung the place

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XVI. RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

(a) AT THE LILY [illegible]

(b) A TYPICAL LOBEDU [illegible]

[facing p. 289]

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RELIGION. In common with the other Bantu tribes of South Africa, the people of the Lowveld have ancestor worship. The form which it takes here bears many resemblances to that found among the Venda and also to that of the Shangana-Tonga though it differs from both in a number of ways. Characteristic of the religion of Lowveld tribes are the predominance of the beer offering to the almost complete exclusion of the blood sacrifice, the use of shrines and dedicated goats or cattle, the powers attributed to old beads and other objects once in the possession of the ancestors, the prominent part played by women, the virtual equality of ancestors on the mother's and father's side and the cult of the *dzimu* in which old men deceive women and the uninitiated by acting the part of ancestors supposed to be returning to the village after certain ceremonies.

The creator-god, to whom however no worship is directed, is known as Khudzwane, use of the term *Modimo* in this sense being in the Lowveld probably a Christian innovation. Belief in a sky-god, such as that of the south-eastern tribes, is absent, while spirits such as the mountain and river spirits believed in by Venda, and Tikoloshe, Impundulu and other half-mythical creatures who play so important a role in the everyday life and beliefs of Pondo and Xhosa are quite unknown in the Lowveld. Instead, one finds the *dzimu* or *dzonzimu*, ancestral spirits who come after sunset after important religious ceremonies in the royal family, during the *Ximuna* drumming and sometimes, among Lobedu, at the installation of an important headman, and call in thin, wailing voices. Often they whistle out their own names or throw stones at the village, scolding people for having broken customs, till beer is brought to them and they are appeased. They are ancestors, yet they are only half-men with one leg and one arm instead of two;[1] they dwell in the sacred woods, and when they come no one is to leave the village, women and children shutting themselves up securely in their huts. The fact that the part is acted by a few old, trusted men is not known to many.

The sacred place at which offerings are made is not the cattle kraal

[1] Among Venda, *dzonzi* are thought to be mountain spirits with one leg, one arm, &c., the sight of whom brings death to the traveller. They have no connexion with ancestor worship and are said to be mostly of Sotho origin. This is clearly a borrowing.

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or back of the hut, as among Zulu-Xhosa, but a shrine in the courtyard of the chief hut. Lowveld shrines vary from family to family but are easily recognisable. A shrine may consist of a mound of earth, a stick and river pebble, a spot where a thithikwane lily has been planted or a long stick planted in the earth like the Shangana-Tonga shrine. The contents of these shrines also vary within a general pattern: the Lobedu royal family place the bones of a sacrificial goat or ox in the mound; other families bury two black river pebbles and a piece of a special kind of antheap, and there are many further variations. Always there are, in addition, charms given by the doctor to prevent the ancestors from causing trouble. Instead of a shrine, or even along with it, one may find a beast or goat dedicated to the ancestors, usually bearing the name of one of them, which will at all important offerings be made to drink of the beer given to the spirits.[1] Important national offerings, especially supplications for rain, are made at graves of deceased chiefs or the sacred wood in which chiefs are buried. Great importance is attached to objects, especially old beads, hoes, spears that have once belonged to the ancestors. These are handed down from generation to generation, are placed beside the shrine when an offering is made or may even be used instead of a shrine in a beer offering. Old beads are peculiarly important for ensuring the health of any one wearing them and are used in the curing of many illnesses caused by neglect of ancestors. Sacred drums are to be found in every tribe; these are the *Ammawe* drums, thought to be inextricably bound up with the welfare of the tribe as a whole. Among the more southerly tribes of the area, these drums are smeared with the first-fruits when the chief eats the first-fruits, beaten on all important occasions such as the harvest offering and pierced on the death of the chief.

The officiator in important offerings is generally the father's sister or, if she be dead, the eldest sister in the family; but if she lives too far away the head of the family himself may officiate. In general, the officiator calls on ancestors both on his father's and on his mother's side and there may even be two shrines, side by side, one for the father's line, one for the mother's. There is no evidence of any differentiation between the four lines of grandparents to the exclusion

[1] The Venda pour the beer on the heart.

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and the use of *dithugula*, objects such as beads which have once been in their possession; but they can also be constrained by medicine or the properties of matter.

Ancestors are capricious: their complaints as seen in the divining bones are usually about being neglected; but they may cause illness to those they love most in order to receive recognition, have their name perpetuated, or their beads worn. They are said to 'hold' the woman experiencing difficult labour, to afflict children with sore eyes, and even to prevent the queen from making rain. Their complaints need imply no omission or neglect on the part of the afflicted descendant, but merely some special desire that could not have been anticipated. The degree of either neglect, or tendance bears no relation to their satisfaction or dissatisfaction, since the ascription of misfortune to the ancestors is always *ex post facto*: hence the paradox that a family that is assiduous in its tendance of the ancestors may suffer more ill health and misfortune than one that has neglected the ancestors for a long time.

Dithugula are instrumental in controlling nature not only indirectly through the ancestors but also directly by virtue of the substances used in them. A *thugula* may be a shrine to an ancestor (male or female), an animal dedicated to him, old beads or objects of iron to which, owing to their having once been in his possession, power to influence him is attributed. But a *thugula* may also be any charm of herbs concocted by a doctor and worn for protective purposes. The queen's rain-medicines are *dithugula*. The most important religious ceremony of the year, the annual offering of beer to ancestors as thanksgiving for the harvest, is also called *thugula*. *Dithugula* thus constitute a category of objects, usually closely associated with the ancestors (though they may be made by a doctor), through which they may be approached, and which have special virtue particularly to give health and protection against ills and epidemics.

Dithugula are found in every lineage which, through its shrines, dedicated animals, and charms, secures the general welfare of its members. The queen's *dithugula*, her rain-medicines, sacred objects, and shrines through which she intercedes with the royal ancestors, are the ultimate symbols of her power and the safeguards of the welfare of the country; and just as certain medicines (*diphaba*), which are used in shrines or offerings to make the ancestors forget their complaints, are pegged round the village by the paternal aunt or sister of its head to protect it against witches, so also the queen may *thugula* the whole country by sending boys to peg medicated sticks on its boundaries as a protection against evil, particularly epidemics that might threaten it from outside.

The queen's control

The basis of the queen's control over nature is her divinity. So bound up is she with nature that her very emotions affect the rain. The complex of royal institutions includes the conceptions that she must be without

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cooled with rain-medicine. The polluted corpse (called *pukudi*, the opposite of *fuga*) is thought of as thrusting up an arm and waving it about to disperse the rain.

It is the duty of the queen each year to *thea* or 'establish' the season propitiously for her people. Certain district heads who are close relatives of the queen have rainpots which they revitalize every year with medicine from the queen and stir them up at the queen's command to ensure a propitious season. In the old days the year was 'established' also by the beating of the sacred drums (*gomana*) and a visit to the royal ancestor graves, but this has fallen into disuse.

If there is drought or if the rain does not come at its appropriate time, people say the queen has not changed the year properly and steps are taken to approach her. Royal relatives may approach her personally or complain in her hearing that she is killing her people by withholding rain; district heads may formally pay homage (*ku lova*) with gifts of £1 or a head of cattle, or may bring a troupe of dancers to please her and invoke her pity at the spectacle of people dancing when they should be hoeing. The songs (*lenga*) are associated with offerings to the ancestors and with rain. If these efforts are of no avail diviners are consulted to determine the cause of drought—the rain-charms may have been 'weakened' or evil practices of witches may have prevented rain. In 1937 the people were told at a tribal gathering to report lightning 'sent' by witches, and shortly afterwards, when lightning had struck a tree near a village, boys were sent to sprinkle every house in the area with *mufuga* to 'cool' the lightning. Witches may also disperse rain by hanging up medicated branches which sway in the air. If it is an ancestor that is 'holding the queen's hands' he or she has to be propitiated by the sacrifice of a black beast or sheep on the grave.

When winds frustrate the efforts of the queen to make rain, especially when a gale disperses suspicious black clouds, people come to condole with her as if she had lost a relative, and it is taboo to work in the fields the next day, just as it is on the day after the first rain of the season and on certain other occasions.

The queen is 'Transformer of the Clouds', the changer of the seasons, and guarantor of their cyclic regularity, but she can exercise her powers auspiciously only in certain conditions and in 'agreement with the ancestors'.

Digoma

The fourth category of forces by which nature is regulated in the interests of man consists of *digoma* which are associated more especially with changes in the status of man. A *goma* is primarily a drum, but as an abstract concept it is particularly identified with the power concentrated in the drum cult. This cult includes the large complex of institutions connected with rites of transition, of which the year-long *nyali-vuhwera* (fertility cult) is one. A *goma* is thought of as something mystical and secret, awesome and esoteric. The circumcision 'school' for boys is called a *goma* which is said to 'bite'

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the initiates. It is something mystically powerful which transforms boys into men. But if the initiation as a whole is a *gome*, so also are the secret formulae, objects, and mummeries that form part of the ceremony.

With the *vyali-vukwara* fertility cult, which is at the same time also an initiation for girls (*vyali*) and for boys (*vukwara*), are associated many *digome*, in the form of masked figures in costumes made of grass, reeds, and leaves, or plays and mummeries emphasizing the value of certain foods. But the greatest of all is *Khindagane*, Bird of Muhale (the royal founder ancestor), ruling spirit of the *vyali*, which is believed to emerge from a pool on moonlight nights, leave mists behind it when it departs, and upon which much of the ritual centres. It is the link between two aspects of sacred forces, that conceived as mysterious, fearful, approached only through elaborate symbolism, and that represented by ancestors and directly approached. For the bird is both a great *gome* and a symbol of the royal ancestors.

Revived in 1938, after an interval of twenty years, the *vyali-vukwara* with its great *digome* is thought to promote abundance and rain, the welfare and happiness of the people. While it lasts it is the main national interest to which all energies are bent and all activities subordinated. Marriages are held up, the normal judicial machinery is at a standstill, and anything that might compete with the ceremonial is interdicted. Since initiates spend only early mornings and evenings at the secret enclosure, they sleep at home and are able to carry on essential domestic tasks for the greater part of the day.

The sacred drums of the tribe (*digome*), four in number, are kept and cared for by the people of Ravothata, a lineage that came from Phalaborwa, where the drum cult is more intimately connected with the chief than among the Lovedu. These drums, which are said to contain under the resonator a human skull and, in the case of the smallest, the facial skin of a councillor, are mystically linked with the life of the queen and the welfare of the tribe. The heir sits on the smallest drum while being taught the rain ritual and it must accompany the queen if ever she is forced to flee from her enemies. The sacred drums are spoken of as *vadimo* (gods) as well as *digome*, and they were beaten twice a year in the old days in a ceremony known as *gomana* as an appeal to the ancestors for rain and to thank them for the harvest. The latter took the form of an initiation into the secrets of the cult at which boys were given certain cuts on their faces.

Associated with the sacred drums and also classed as *digome* are the *vavidzimi*, the weird whistling ancestor spirits of the royal lineage who come to earth in the guise, it is said, of half-men with one eye, one arm, and one leg, to take part in the rites connected with the sacred drums and in the annual harvest *thapalo* ceremony in all royal and certain other lineages. They are, in fact, as is known to those initiated in the *gomana*, old men masquerading as spirits. They appear in the bush near the village and join in the singing of *lenge* songs which are sung, on these occasions, through specially constructed secret whistles.

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The *gumma* drums are no longer used by the queen to appeal to the ancestors for rain, but she permits boys from the royal village to attend *gumma* initiation ceremonies held occasionally, with her permission, by an outsider. The *gumma* concept, despite the support it gives to the mystical attributes of the queen, appears to represent a conceptual pattern that is autonomous and more fully developed in some neighbouring tribes, where the moments of the agricultural year were signalised by the sounding of the drums which were thought to bring rain and fertility, to bless the crops and cattle, and to safeguard the country from disease and enemies. In some tribes today the cult is a recent innovation in the form of initiation schools managed by outsiders who have their own drums and *mudzimu* visitors from tribes where the cult is better known.

Evil and how to avoid it

It has been shown that the Lovedu conceive the order of nature as something essentially man-controlled through the power of medicine and magic (*vupago*), through the ancestors, through the divinity and powers of the queen, and through the mysterious forces associated with *digwa*. The seasons and the rain have to be established by the queen for the crops to prosper; the baby 'grows by medicines' which guard it from harm and sickness and imbue it with health and strength; adulthood is achieved through initiations and *digwa*; and over and above all, there is the watchful care of the gods. The natural order accordingly can and must be manipulated by utilising benevolent and nullifying malignant forces, in order to further man's good fortune or to prevent evil from befalling him.

The Lovedu have elaborated some interesting concepts of impersonal evil powers which are concentrations of forces brought about by certain concatenations of conditions or events. These concepts are found over a much wider area, but have received special emphasis among the Lovedu. To them the ultimate good is rain. Rain is regarded as not merely the material source of life and happiness and the physical basis of man's sense of security; it is also a symbol of spiritual well-being and a manifestation that the social order is operating smoothly. Hence coolness denotes a state of euphoria: men and matter to be in order and to function properly have to be kept cool; angry ancestors must be cooled by means of medicine; even witches can be cooled and so made to forget their evil purposes. On the other hand, heat as the antithesis of the main basis of man's security, the cooling, life-giving rain, is conceived as a destructive force leading to a state of dysphoria.

'Heat' is a concept suggested by the physical properties of heat; it may sometimes be sensed, for example, as an important factor in fever, one of the most prevalent illnesses. But actually its operation is inferred from conditions of which 'heat' is clearly the cause, such as droughts and the desiccation of the crops. Here the generation of heat is ascribed to the effect upon the earth of disturbances of the regular course of nature by the burial in it

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is thought to be so deeply attached to her daughter's children that she is always troubling them—wanting them to be named after her, to be given her beads to wear, to have a dedicated goat or shrine set up. One therefore sometimes finds three or four shrines in a homestead.

The Local Group

The local group reflects the balance that is achieved among the Lobedu between agnates on the one hand, and on the other, relatives on the mother's side and affines (one and the same thing depending on the generation from which they are viewed).

A random group of thirteen homesteads forming a neighbourhood, is shown in Figure 8. They are closely linked by agnatic,

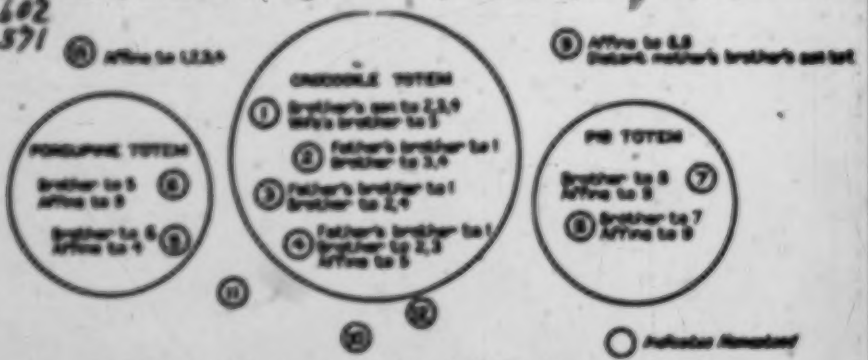

FIG. 8. Agnatic, cognatic and affinal ties in a neighbourhood.

cognatic and affinal ties and share in many economic, ritual and recreational activities.

These homesteads fall into three main clusters of agnates belonging to the Crocodile, Porcupine and Pig totems near which are two homesteads No. 9 and No. 13, which have affinal and cognatic links with these clusters, and three unrelated homesteads, Nos. 10, 11 and 12, the last-named being foreigners, Tsonga, who had little to do with the rest.

The Crocodile cluster (homesteads 1, 2, 3 and 4) had originally been a single homestead which had broken up on the death of the father, head of the district. Other close agnates lived a little further off, not shown on the diagram. This cluster